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MEMORANDUM
ON
RESIGNATION

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MEMORANDUM

ON

RESIGNATION

August 1914

by

JOHN VISCOUNT MORLEY

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
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1928

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PREFACE

My uncle, the late Lord Morley of Blackburn, left me, under certain restrictions contained in his will, a large selection of papers to be published at my discretion. After consulting some of his friends I have come to the conclusion that the publication of his Memorandum on the War, or rather on the diplomacy which led to his resignation at the beginning of August 1914, ought not to be any longer delayed. Most of the leading actors in the great tragedy have given their account to the world. After the outbreak of war Lord Morley put into shape the notes he had taken during the week or ten days of hurried negotiations and Cabinet deliberations. Once the die was cast he felt that no advantage could be gained by public utterances, and he was satisfied to write down for posterity the principles, opinions, and impressions he formed on this occasion and on which he acted. At various times before his death he contemplated and constantly discussed with me the question of publication, but postponed it on various grounds, chiefly, I think, because he did not feel equal to controversy with old friends at a time when his vital energies were ebbing and literary composition was becoming slow and painful. I feel sure, however, that I am now fulfilling his

wishes in making this Memorandum public. My friend, Mr. F. W. Hirst, has prepared a brief introduction for the purpose of elucidating certain points in the document.

GUY MORLEY.

LONDON, *August* 16, 1928.

INTRODUCTION

AFTER the declaration of war and his resignation from the Cabinet, Lord Morley began to prepare for ultimate publication his notes on the Cabinet proceedings from July 24 onwards. By that time the Serbian question had assumed an aspect menacing to the peace of Europe, though for several days public attention at home was distracted from external dangers by the Ulster crisis and by preparations for the summer holidays. Lord Morley consulted several friends, while he was still lingering over the task and doubtful of its execution. Among others the late Lord Bryce pressed him in the interest of history not to fail in what was really a duty to posterity, by placing on record his personal account of those momentous transactions, which ended in Great Britain's entry into the Great War and in his own retirement and that of Mr. John Burns from Mr. Asquith's Cabinet. Everyone acquainted with the author's mind, temper, and style will feel that the document now published at the instance of his literary executor is a highly characteristic composition, bearing the marks of much labour and art. But it is also clear from the papers which he left along with the original manuscript and the corrected typewritten copy that he did not trust entirely to his own notes, impressions, and recollections. His colleague,

Mr. John Burns, whose opinions on the questions at issue during the negotiations and on the final decision harmonised pretty fully with his own, gave valuable assistance from time to time, and was responsible for the addition of at least one sentence when the last draft was being made. Moreover, Lord Morley communicated his paper, when it was completed and typewritten, to Earl Loreburn, a former member of the Cabinet, whose theory of foreign policy in relation to British intervention on the Continent was derived, like Morley's, from Cobden. Lord Morley selected a number of Foreign Office papers and letters bearing on the diplomacy which led up to the war, as well as personal letters received after his resignation from colleagues, friends, and admirers. These he deposited in a despatch box with his Memorandum. In our printed text the typed copy has been followed, as it incorporates a few amendments. But it has been carefully collated with Morley's original manuscript, and one or two typewriter's slips, which he had not noticed, have been put right. The seeming vagueness of the first sentence—where the later differs from the earlier version — is undoubtedly intentional, because "the important line" taken by Sir Edward Grey, and the Cabinet discussions which ensued were continuous and inconclusive, spread over several days and not confined to one.

On the larger controversy of War Guilt, as distinct from British intervention, Lord Morley did not embark, for reasons which may easily be surmised, even if they had not been made known in personal talk. He knew

that in his own life-time all the materials for a complete judgement would not be published. He knew, too, that while he was engaged on the smaller task Earl Loreburn had approached from a similar angle the larger problem of "How the War came".[1] Nor was he dissatisfied with Loreburn's apportionment of the guilt. Lastly, even if the materials had been adequate and Loreburn's work had not appeared, age and physical weakness made it out of the question for him to undertake an inquiry so intricate and laborious. It may be added that, while agreeing in the main with Lord Loreburn, Morley dissented strongly from many of the facts and conclusions in Lord Haldane's *Before the War*, which came out soon afterwards.

Since Lord Morley's death, four important publications have been issued throwing light on the subject matter of his Memorandum. These are *The Genesis of the War* by the late Earl of Oxford (1926) and his Diary, extracts from which have been published recently in two large volumes. Of equal, if not greater, interest to readers of this document are Viscount Grey's *Twenty-five Years* (published in 1925), in which are several chapters marking his divergence from the Peace Party in the Cabinet.[2] That divergence, as Lord Morley's

[1] Earl Loreburn's book was published with this title by Methuen's in 1919.

[2] In preparing his book, Lord Grey had invited the assistance of Mr. J. A. Spender, whose *Life, Politics and Journalism* (1927) adds many personal touches concerning Lord Morley's relations with the Cabinet and with the diplomacy that culminated in July-August 1914.

papers indicate, first came to a head in the Agadir Crisis of 1911, when the Cabinet was not kept informed of the diplomatic approach to war. Thereupon Lord Morley, on discovering what had been done, and learning of the secret conversations between our naval and military experts and those of France, took steps to rectify matters, and obtained from the Prime Minister a pledge that in the future no diplomatic steps should be taken which might involve naval or military commitments on behalf of France, without the knowledge and previous assent of the Cabinet.

A fourth Cabinet contribution to the subject of Lord Morley's Memorandum has come from Mr. Winston Churchill, whose four volumes on *The World Crisis* were completed in 1927. Mr. Churchill tells part of the inner history of the Agadir negotiations, and also informs us that in the closing days of July 1914 Mr. Asquith's Cabinet was overwhelmingly pacific. "At least three-quarters of its members were determined not to be drawn into a European quarrel, unless Great Britain were herself attacked." Lord Morley, it will be seen, did not think there was more than a bare majority for neutrality in the Cabinet. Lord Grey wrote, in his sixteenth chapter, with reference to those who favoured neutrality in case war should break out on the Continent: "It is needless to inquire whether the group included half, or less, or more than half the Cabinet. It was sufficient in number and influence to have broken up the Cabinet." How the peace group was itself disintegrated until only four, and at last only two, were left to resign, is told for the

first time in these dramatic pages. Though Mr. John Burns was the first to act, on a decision which he thought tantamount to war, no real difference of doctrine or application divided the two colleagues. We are permitted to print two letters which will illustrate Morley's feelings towards his friend :

FLOWERMEAD,
WIMBLEDON PARK, S.W.,
July 9, 16.

MY DEAR BURNS,

I shall not soon, nor ever, forget your visit here to-night.

I am more melted than for many a long long day past. The breadth of social survey and foresight—the angry vision of this hideous war—the tender pathos of the garden and the empty room—it all makes me proud that I hold the hand of such a comrade in a great piece of history.

Yours always,

M.

FLOWERMEAD, PRINCES ROAD,
WIMBLEDON PARK, S.W.,
August 29, 1918.

MY DEAR BURNS,

Thank you for sending me the book you promised, most valuable as a record of the stupid and evil Diplomacies only too well known to you and me. I thank you also for your company.

You cannot guess how one of these evenings of yours lights me up, interesting me, amuses, informs, and stimulates. You take one travelling over such unexpected

diversity of area and topic. We were electrified by your figures immense and precise of the proportion of the population of the U.K., of the additions that could be made to the state acquisition of the land of the U.K., and of the railways, by the vast pile of millions now being flung out over the land and railroads of Flanders. Your view accurate of the men you had met in the tramcar, just back with their tackle on their shoulders and the French mud on their clothes and hands only a day off from the actual fight, gave extra point to your expert estimate and interpretation of the military bulletins.

You cannot think how all this heartened up the two ancients who listened to you. Nature or the Stars have given you my dear Burns the art of clear and energetic narrative with no *falsetto* in it. I am supposed to be a man of letters and you are not, but you beat me hollow last night, as often before, in coming out pat with an apt reference from the books : *e.g.* in talking of some weak parliamentary colleagues of ours you summed up the case with Dante's " don't let us reason with them *ma guarda e passa*; they're too bad for heaven, too good for the other place ".

By the way, I ought to have recalled Swinburne's lines in San Lorenzo, " Grato m' è 'l sonno, e più l' esser di sasso ".

You've been to that sublime chapel in your travels.

My wife was most grateful to you for reciting to her Swinburne's half-dozen lines about the babe on its mother's knee.

And I for my part enjoyed your bit of Madame de Stael when our young little whelp was so overjoyed with you and your friendly reproach to me, for after all though I was a trifle world weary I had sufficiently warmed my hands at the fire of life—Landor I think. I cannot but like to think of you in your Library, so ample and well chosen within its own range, and that no narrow one. It will some day, I am sure, find an honoured place in that London in which your interest has always been so active and so important and which you study with such indomitable attention.

We hope you'll come again, and if Mrs. Burns would come too, we should be all the better pleased.

Will you let me say that a night like this makes me feel proud to have marched out in manful comradeship with John Burns to face wild winds and stormy weather.

Your sincere friend,

MORLEY.

It appears from the Memorandum that Lord Morley might have gone beyond the purely negative attitude of Non-Intervention, which had been the normal and traditional policy of Great Britain when wars broke out between foreign powers in which British interests were not directly concerned. He would have made use of the German inquiries about Belgian neutrality to prolong the negotiations, and would apparently have been willing to follow the policy of Mr. Gladstone's administration in 1870, so far as to make British neutrality dependent on the non-invasion of Belgium. The difference between his attitude and that of Sir Edward Grey in this respect

comes out in Sir Edward's despatch of August 1 to Sir E. Goschen, then our Ambassador in Berlin, relating a conversation with Prince Lichnowsky, the German Ambassador in London. Whether Lichnowsky's questions received due consideration is not clear, and Lord Morley's Memorandum does not remove the obscurity. But it is clear that the Foreign Secretary declined to promise British neutrality, even if the German Government pledged itself not to violate Belgian neutrality.[1]

It has been mentioned that Lord Morley sent his Memorandum to Lord Loreburn. A correspondence ensued in the autumn of 1917. Two of Lord Loreburn's letters on the subject were preserved by Morley and deposited along with the Memorandum. "This document", so wrote Loreburn after perusing the Memorandum in a letter of November 1, 1917, "I assume will see the light at the date you think most convenient. It is, of course, written from the inner sanctuary of Government and leaves an indelible proof of the central fact that our duties to France under the Entente caused our entry into the war, and that the case of Belgium might (but for that) have been dealt with and Belgium secured without war." Morley's reply is missing, but there is a second letter from Loreburn of November 5 declaring his opinion that the "Memo of your last Cabinet . . . has much value in several ways". He lays stress upon three points. The first is biographical

[1] The reader will find Sir Edward Grey's despatch to Sir E. Goschen and also Sir E. Goschen's preceding despatch to Sir Edward Grey printed in the Appendix at pp. 37-39.

or autobiographical. "It shows without any express assertion that you had been misled for a long time, like many others, as to the true relations with France and as to Grey's inward conception of them. It shows why you tried to prevent this horror, and at what stages in July and August 1914. . . . I think this document is due to you and Burns."

In the second place "it has a historical interest; for it shows conclusively that the real thing which brought us into this war was our relations to France and not Belgium".

Thirdly, "it has a practical value for the future; for it shows how secret diplomacy leads to misconception of their true position, when the deceivers have to determine on action, and how the knowledge that they have been deceivers, even if imperfectly realised, makes them irresolute and blunt in their perceptions, for they are always thinking not only of the impending danger but also of the way in which they can reconcile their previous concealments and misrepresentations with their present action".

Morley's private strictures on the conduct of his old colleagues, from whom he parted in grief and sorrow, were less embittered than Loreburn's; for the ties of personal friendship and affection which united him to some of them could not be broken by public differences —though the chasm was deep, wide, and unbridgeable. But he never regretted the course he had taken, or swerved from his conviction that his country should have been kept out of the war. He held that the conse-

quences of the war justified his opinions and actions, differing in this respect from several friends who had agreed with him at the beginning of August 1914.

In view of official publications, which are gradually revealing the diplomatic history of Great Britain's Ententes with France and Russia, it is unnecessary to say much about Morley's previous associations with the foreign policy of the Cabinet. It may, however, be useful to mention one or two points. He was not made aware of the short but sharp crisis in our relations with Germany, which occurred soon after the formation of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman's Government. During his tenure of the India Office his relations with Sir Edward Grey were most cordial and intimate ; and so they remained, in spite of the Cabinet crisis about Agadir, until the outbreak of the Great War. After his retirement Lord Morley, like his friend Lord Loreburn, began to retrace and reflect upon previous diplomatic transactions and to survey the policy pursued by the Foreign Office. He was much struck by a Memorandum written by Mr. Eyre Crowe on " the Present State of British Relations with France and Germany ", dated Foreign Office, January 1, 1907, and marked " Secret ". Neither Morley nor Loreburn (who refers to it in a letter) seemed to have paid much attention to it at the time, as they were both immersed in their own work. But Morley's copy (preserved in the same despatch box with his own Memorandum) profusely marked and accompanied by one or two marginal notes, testifies to the importance he set upon it as a clue to Foreign Office policy.

The Crowe Memorandum is printed (Appendix A) in the third volume of *British Documents on the Origins of the War*, edited by Messrs. Gooch and Temperley (pp. 397-420). It appears from the Minutes that Sir Edward Grey valued it very highly and ordered it to be sent to the Prime Minister, Lord Ripon, Mr. Asquith, Mr. Morley, and Mr. Haldane. In one of his marginal notes Morley remarks that the great vice of diplomacy is that it does not allow for fluidity—for new planets, or world powers, swimming into the skies, *e.g.* Japan and the United States. His chief objection to Crowe's essay seems to be that it makes too much of German Imperialism and too little of British Imperialism; but there are several passages with which he agreed, and one of these may be cited here as expressing his own views on an important aspect of British foreign policy. It follows a statement that the first interest of all countries is the preservation of National Independence and that England, "more than any other non-insular Power, has a direct and positive interest in the maintenance of the independence of nations, and therefore must be the natural enemy of any country threatening the independence of others and the natural protector of the weaker communities". The Crowe Memorandum then proceeds: "Second only to the ideal of independence, nations have always cherished the right of free intercourse and trade in the world's markets, and in proportion as England champions the principle of the largest measure of general freedom of commerce she undoubtedly strengthens her hold on the interested friendship of other nations, at least to the

extent of making them feel less apprehensive of naval supremacy in the hands of a Free Trade England than they would in the face of a predominant protectionist Power. This is an aspect of the Free Trade question which is apt to be overlooked. It has been well said that every country, if it had the option, would of course prefer itself to hold the power of supremacy at sea, but that, this choice being excluded, it would rather see England hold that power than any other state." On the whole, however, in spite of agreement here and there, the policy of the Crowe Memorandum, with its endorsement of Balance of Power, represents a line, and points in a direction, antipathetic to Morley and to the views that appear in his own Memorandum. He had welcomed the French Entente, but he used his influence at every opportunity to prevent friendship from France developing into hostility towards Germany.

I

On or about July 24-27 [1] Grey took a very important line in the Cabinet. He informed us of the contents of Buchanan's telegram of July 24 from Petersburg: describing Sazonoff's hopes that England would not fail to proclaim her solidarity with France and Russia ; his warnings to us that the general European question was involved and England could not afford to efface herself from the problems now at issue ; that she would sooner or later be dragged into war if it did break out ; and, as Buchanan thought, even if England declined to join, France and Russia were determined to make a strong stand, *i.e.* in plain language, to fight Austria and Germany. [White print, No. 6.[2]]

Then Grey in his own quiet way, which is none the less impressive for being so simple, and so free from the *cassant* and over-emphatic tone that is Asquith's vice on such occasions, made a memorable pronouncement. The time had come,

[1] In the MS. 26 was written, but this is crossed out and 24-27 substituted.

[2] See pages 33-36, Appendix.

he said, when the Cabinet was bound to make up its mind plainly whether we were to take an active part with the two other Powers of the Entente, or to stand aside in the general European question, and preserve an absolute neutrality.

We could no longer defer decision. Things were moving very rapidly. We could no longer wait on accident, and postpone. If the Cabinet was for Neutrality, he did not think that he was the man to carry out such a policy. Here he ended in accents of unaffected calm and candour. The Cabinet seemed to heave a sort of sigh, and a moment or two of breathless silence fell upon us. I followed him, expressing my intense satisfaction that he had brought the inexorable position, to which circumstances had now brought us, plainly and definitely before us. It was fairer to France and everybody else, ourselves included. Though he had at least once, talking to an ambassador, drawn a distinction between diplomatic and military intervention, it was henceforth assumed that intervention meant active resort to arms. We rambled, as even the best Cabinets are apt to do, from the cogent riddle that the European Sphinx or Sphinxes had posed, into incidental points and secondary aspects. I could not, on the instant, gather with any certainty in which

direction opinion was inclining. No wonder. Everybody had suddenly awakened to the startling fact that nothing less than the continued existence of the Ministry was this time—the first time—in sharp peril from differences within, and not from the House of Commons.

Later, we were pressed by the Prime Minister and Grey to examine the neutrality of Belgium and our obligations under the Treaty of 1839. But it was thrown back day after day as less urgent than France. I took down to the Cabinet the words of Lord Derby about the Luxemburg guarantee of 1867; mentioning the opposition to his language from the Duke of Argyll and others. But, perhaps quite as much my fault as that of anybody else, the discussion was thin and perfunctory. Simon contributed scarcely anything and the Lord Chancellor even less. A Cabinet usually thinks of one thing at once, and the question of Belgium was up to this date, and in truth up to the morning of August 3rd, when Grey had to set out his whole case in the House of Commons, secondary to the pre-eminent controversy of the Anglo-French Entente. One of these days Grey rather suddenly let fall his view, in the pregnant words that German policy was that of a great "European aggressor, as bad

as Napoleon". "I have no German partialities", I observed, "but you do not give us evidence." Perhaps he might have cited the series of Naval Laws.

Meanwhile Harcourt had been busy in organising opinion among his Cabinet colleagues in favour of neutrality. This was meant for a counter-move that[1] was being openly worked with his best daemonic energy by Winston, with strenuous simplicity by Grey, and *sourdement* by the Lord Chancellor—the Prime Minister seeing and waiting. There was no intrigue about it either way. All was above-board. Harcourt got me to his room in the House of Commons one night as I was passing along the corridor and I found Beauchamp, M'Kinnon Wood, Hobhouse, Pease, very zealous against extension of entente to alliance. They calculated to a tune of eight or nine men in the Cabinet likely to agree with us. I think I attended one other meeting of this Peace Group in the same place, and under the same auspices. Harcourt this week two or three times threw me little slips at the Cabinet table, "That I must resign is more and more evident."

[1] Typewritten copy reads "that". MS. has "which" crossed out and "that" substituted. The meaning must be "to that which".

One of these days I tapped Winston on the shoulder, as he took his seat next me. "Winston, we have beaten you after all." He smiled cheerfully. Well he might. *O pectora caeca!*

Lloyd George, not by design, furthered the good cause by a very remarkable piece of intelligence communicated to the Cabinet, acquired I think at the suggestion of the Prime Minister. He informed us that he had been consulting the Governor and Deputy Governor of the Bank of England, other men of light and leading in the City, also cotton men, and steel and coal men, etc., in the North of England, in Glasgow, etc., and they were all *aghast* at the bare idea of our plunging into the European conflict; how it would break down the whole system of credit with London as its centre, how it would cut up commerce and manufacture—they told him—how it would hit labour and wages and prices, and, when the winter came, would inevitably produce violence and tumult. When I pressed this all-important prospect in a later debate, the Chancellor of the Exchequer said rather tartly that he had never said he believed it all. "In the present temper of labour", said I, "this tremendous dislocation of industrial life must be fraught with public danger. The atmosphere

of war cannot be friendly to order, in a democratic system that is verging on the humour of '48." But then the wisest saws, as I have many a time found before now, count for little in the hour of practical emergency. This first-class and vital element in settling our policy received little of the attention that it well deserved; it vanished in the diplomatic hurry.

Then they were rather surprised at the stress I laid upon the Russian side of things. "Have you ever thought", I put to them, "what will happen if Russia wins? If Germany is beaten and Austria is beaten, it is not England and France who will emerge pre-eminent in Europe. It will be Russia. Will that be good for Western civilisation? I at least don't think so. If she says she will go to Constantinople, or boldly annex both northern and neutral zone in Persia, or insist on railways up to the Indian and Afghan frontier, who will prevent her? Germany is unpopular in England, but Russia is more unpopular still. And people will rub their eyes when they realise that Cossacks are their victorious fellow-champions for Freedom, Justice, Equality of man (especially Jew man), and respect for treaties (in Persia for instance)." They listened rather intently, and Lloyd George

told me after that he had never thought of all this.

I think it was to-day[1] I put a really strong point. Grey has more than once congratulated Europe on the existence of two great confederacies, Triple Alliance and Triple Entente, as healthily preserving the balance of power. Balance! What a beautiful euphemism for the picture of two giant groups armed to the teeth, each in mortal terror of the other, both of them passing year after year in an incurable fever of jealousy and suspicion!

The Cabinet for the first time became seriously uneasy about the danger of these foreign affairs to our own cohesion. For the very first time something of the old cleavage between the Liberal League and the faithful Campbell-Bannerman, Harcourt, and myself began to be very sensibly felt. Hitherto not a whisper of the old schism of the Boer war. As I walked away with Burns after the Cabinet of the 29th, he pressed my arm and said with vehement emphasis, "*Now mind, we look to you to stand firm*". He repeated it on Friday. I was not keen in response, as to my taking any lead. We were all first alarmed on the Saturday

[1] *i.e.* July 26.

evening. Burns himself took the lead, to good purpose, and intimated in his most downright tones that the warning to Germany not to try it on against French coasts or ships in the Channel, was more than he could stand (A)[1], not only because it was practically a declaration of war on sea leading inevitably to a war on land, but mainly because it was the symbol of an alliance with France with whom no such understanding had hitherto existed. This was a great improvement upon groups in private conclave. Somebody has said that egotism is sometimes furtive, sometimes frank. Burns is never furtive, whatever else may be said of him. This proceeding to-night was admirably frank, and took full effect. Runciman with an anxious face, speaking of the Cabinet that was appointed for Sunday morning, muttered to me as we left the room, "I'm very much afraid this is going to break us up to-morrow".

Curiously enough—by way of irrelevant parenthesis—as it soon fell out, on the 29th I happened to have a party for Lord Kitchener at the United Services Club. Present, besides him, Jellicoe,

[1] A is J. M.'s. mark. The words from "not only" to "existed", which J. M. added to the typewritten copy, are in the handwriting of Mr. John Burns.

Winston, Crewe, Haldane, Bryce, Knollys, Guy. Bryce was shocked at Haldane's war talk. I told him afterwards he must no longer think us a Peace Cabinet. Within ten days Kitchener was installed in my chair in the Cabinet! The only case, I should think, of an active military commander in the Cabinet since Wellington joined the Liverpool Ministry in 1819 as Master General of the Ordnance.

II

Sunday, August 2.—Cabinet. Main question resumed was the language to be held by Grey to Cambon in the afternoon. Neutrality of Belgium, though Asquith pressed for attention to that topic, was secondary to the question of our neutrality in the struggle between Germany and France; and to our liability to France under the Entente. The situation now was this: Grey admitted that we were not bound by the same obligation of honour to France as bound France to Russia. He professed to stand by what he had told Cambon in his letter of 1912, that we were left perfectly free to decide whether we would assist France by armed force. We were not committed, he always said, to action in a contingency that had not yet arisen and might never arise. No immediate aggressive action was entailed upon us, unless there was action against France in the Channel or the North Sea. So much then for the point of honour arising on the French Entente.

On August 3rd Grey received news that Germany would be prepared, if we would pledge ourselves to neutrality, to agree that its fleet would not attack the North Coast of France. Grey replied that this was far too narrow an engagement for us. Why ? And if it was too narrow, why not at least take it as a basis for widening and enlargement ? Pure precipitancy ! At any rate there had as yet been no word said in the Cabinet about an Expeditionary Force. But I had been too virtuous an attendant at the C.I.D.[1] for several years, not to know that this was a settled aim in the minds of many, if not most, of its members.

Harcourt assured me before discussion began, that he believed he could count on ten or eleven men against Grey's view that we had both moral obligations of honour and substantial obligations of policy in taking sides with France. After a very fair discussion Grey was authorised to give an assurance to Cambon that " if the German Fleet comes into the Channel or through the North Sea to undertake hostile operations against French coasts or shipping, the British fleet will give all the protection in its power. This assurance of course subject to the policy of His

[1] Committee of Imperial Defence.

Majesty's Government receiving the support of Parliament, and must not be taken as binding His Majesty's Government to take any action until the above contingency of action by the German fleet takes place" (No. 146).[1] There were two lines of argument for this warning to Germany. (1) We owed it to France, in view of the Entente, and also of her value to us in the Mediterranean. (2) We could not acquiesce in Franco-German naval conflict in the narrow seas, on our door-step so to say. This authorisation, however, was not unanimous. Burns, with remarkable energy, force, and grasp, insisted that this was neither more nor less than a challenge to Germany, tantamount to a declaration of war against her. He wound up with a refusal to be a party to it. Asquith took the blow a trifle too coolly, and, with a little trouble, eventually persuaded Burns to postpone his resignation until the Cabinet to be held at 6.30 in the evening. I said to Burns as we broke up at luncheon time, "I think you are mistaken in going on this particular proposal. The door-step argument makes a warning to Germany defensible, apart from French Entente. I expect that I am certain

[1] The reference is to No. 146 of *Great Britain and the European Crisis.*

to go out with you, but on the general policy of armed intervention, as against diplomatic energy and armed neutrality, to which Grey has *step by step* been drawing the Cabinet on." I made just as much impression on John Burns as I expected—that is, not the slightest.

The Belgian question took its place in to-day's discussion, but even now only a secondary place. Grey very properly asked leave to warn the German Ambassador that, unless Germany was prepared to give us a reply in the sense of the reply we had from France, it would be hard to restrain English feeling on any violation of Belgian neutrality by either combatant. This leave of course we gave him. There was a general, but vague, assent to our liabilities under the Treaty of 1839, but there was no assent to the employment of a land force, and, I think, no mention of it.

I do not recall whether it was at the morning or the afternoon Cabinet that Grey told us of his talk with Lichnowsky; I remember noting that it seemed a great pity, while "keeping our hands free", not to take advantage of the occasion for more talk and negotiation. It was worth trying at any rate, instead of this wooden *non possumus*, even though Lichnowsky's ideas

or suggestions were merely personal and unauthorised by instructions.[1]

The plain truth, as I conceive the truth to be, is this. The German line on Belgian neutrality might be met in two ways. One, we might at once make it a *casus belli*; the other, we might protest with direct energy, as the British Government protested on the Russian repudiation in 1870 of the Black Sea articles of the Treaty of Paris, and push on by diplomatising. What was the difficulty of the second course? Why, our supposed entanglement with France, and nothing else. The precipitate and peremptory blaze about Belgium was due less to indignation at the violation of a Treaty than to natural perception of the plea that it would furnish for intervention on behalf of France, for expeditionary force, and all the rest of it. Belgium was to take the place that had been taken before, as pleas for war, by Morocco and Agadir.

Now for personal movements. Simon and Lloyd George drove me to lunch at Beauchamp's and our talk was on the footing that we were all three for resignation. Simon said to me privately that he felt pretty sure of decisive influence over Lloyd George, and that he (Simon) looked to

[1] See Appendix, pp. 38, 39.

resignation as quite inevitable. Present: Lord Beauchamp, Simon, Lloyd George, Harcourt, Samuel, Pease, M'Kinnon Wood (not sure about Runciman). It wore all the look of an important gathering, but was in truth a very shallow affair. On the surface they were pretty stalwart against allowing a mistaken interpretation of entente to force us into a Russian or Central European quarrel. The general voice was loud that "Burns was right", and that we should not have passed Grey's proposed language to Cambon. They all pressed the point that the Cabinet was being rather artfully drawn on step by step to war for the benefit of France and Russia. If I, or anybody else, could only have brought home to them that the compound and mixed argument of French liability and Belgian liability must end in expeditionary force, and active part in vast and long-continued European war, the Cabinet would undoubtedly have perished that very evening, Lloyd George and Simon heading the schism. I held that the door-step point was awkward, if we stopped there. I said that as for myself, I felt bound to go, on wider grounds. Personally my days were dwindling, I was a notorious peace-man and little-Englander, etc., my disappearance would be totally different

from theirs; the future responsibilities to Asquith, to the party, to the constituencies, were quite different in their case, with their lives before them, and long issues committed to their charge. They made a loud, prompt protest of course. Lloyd George and Simon were energetically decided at the end, as they had been at the beginning, to resist at all costs the bellicose inferences from the entente. Pease told us that he had been lunching with the Prime Minister, who begged him to keep the *conciliabule* to which he was going, "out of mischief", or some such good-natured phrase. Pease also argued that Grey was never quite so stiff as he seemed. His tone convinced me that the Quaker President of the Peace Society would not be over squeamish about having a hand in Armageddon. What exactly brought Lloyd George among us, and what the passing computations for the hour inside his lively brain, I could not make out.

Two hours' rumination at the Club. Felt acutely what Mr. Gladstone had often told me, that a public man can have no graver responsibility than quitting a Cabinet on public grounds. No act for which he may be more justly called to full account. Anybody can hold and advocate unpopular opinions; but withdrawal from a

Cabinet is a definite act, involving relations for good or ill with other people, and possibly affecting besides all else the whole machinery of domestic government. It concerns a man's principle and creed; it affects intimate and confidential relations with fellow-workers; it concerns his party, its strength and weakness, the balance of power in its ranks and its organisation. No fugitive Sabbath musing was it, either then or since, that filled my mind.

The dissolution of the Ministry was that afternoon in full view. Would even the break-up of the Ministry be less of an evil both for Liberal principles, and the prospects and power of the Liberal party, than their wholesale identification with a Cabinet committed to intervention in arms by sea and land in Central Europe and all the meshes of the Continental system? It is easy to get a question into a false position. Never easier than now. The significance of the French Entente had been rather disingenuously played with, before both the Cabinet and Parliament. An entente was evidently something even more dangerous for us than an alliance. An alliance has definite covenants. An entente is vague, rests on point of honour, to be construed by accident and convenience. The Prime Minister

and Grey had both of them assured the House of Commons that we had no engagements unknown to the country. Yet here we were confronted by engagements that were vast indeed, because indefinite and undefinable. The same two Ministers and others had deliberately and frequently, in reply to anxious protests from Harcourt and myself, minimised the significance of the systematic conferences constantly going on between the military and naval officers of the two countries. Then the famous letter to Cambon of November 1912, which we had extorted from Grey—what a singularly thin and deceptive document it was turning out!

No political rumination of mine, again, could ever leave out the effect of a war upon Home Rule. What more certain to impair the chances of a good settlement of Home Rule than the bottomless agitations of a great war? I travelled in my mind over all the well-trodden ground of the diplomacies of the last fortnight. I recalled a conversation, recorded in some blue print, between Grey and Lichnowsky, in which there was almost a glow and fervour not common in such affairs, over the blessed improvement in the relations of England and Germany during the last three or four years. Why was not this

great new fact, instead of the Entente, made the centre, the pivot, the starting-point of new negotiations? Grey's fine character had achieved an influence in Europe that was the noblest asset for the fame of England and the glory of peace. In a few hours it would be gone. I could not but be penetrated by the precipitancy of it all. What grounds for expecting that the ruinous waste and havoc of war would be repaid by peace on better terms than were already within reach of reason and persistent patience. When we counted our gains, what would they amount to, when reckoned against the ferocious hatred that would burn with inextinguishable fire, for a whole generation at least, between two great communities better fitted to understand one another than any other pair in Europe? This moral devastation is a worse incident of war even than human carnage, and all the other curses with which war lashes its victims and its dupes. With a fleet of overwhelming power, a disinterestedness beyond suspicion, a Foreign Minister of proved ability, truthfulness and self-control, when the smoke of battle-fields had cleared from the European sky, England might have exerted an influence not to be acquired by a hundred of her little Expeditionary Forces. Grey, after too long delay, had wisely and man-

fully posed the issue of the hour for his colleagues when he declared that we must now decide between intervention and neutrality, and that for neutrality he was not the man. Nor am I the man, said I to myself, to sit in the Council of War into which Campbell-Bannerman's Cabinet is to be transformed. It is, after all, not to be endured that not even two men in it should be found to " testify " for convictions. Nor were these convictions merely abstract or general. They were supported by my full and accurate knowledge of the facts of the particular situation. I could not be sure that the fervid tone of the colleagues whom I had just left, sincere though it was, would last. I saw no standard-bearer. The power of Asquith and Grey, and the natural "cohesion of office", would prove too hard for an isolated group to resist. The motives of Lloyd George were a riddle. He knew that his " stock " had sunk dangerously low ; peace might be the popular card against the adventurous energy of Winston ; war would make mince-meat of the Land Question. And the break-up of Government and Party might well make any man pause quite apart from demagogic calculations. In plain truth the Liberal party was already shattered and could not win the approaching

election, mainly owing to Lloyd George himself. He was on the eve of the mistake of his life. Let him and others do what they would, and with a balance of motives in their minds as legitimate as my own. For me at any rate—*the future being what it must inevitably be*—no choice was open.

So I wrestled all the afternoon, and in this vein I made my way through the crowds in Whitehall to Downing Street. My decision was due to no one particular conversation, telegram, despatch ; to none of the private correspondence from abroad, which Grey used to confide to me as representing the Foreign Office in the House of Lords. It was the result of a whole train of circumstance and reflection.

Cabinet at 6.30. Grey reported his conversation with Cambon. Burns said he must go. The Prime Minister still bespoke him for a talk at the close of the Cabinet. As we got up from our chairs, I said quietly to Asquith that I feared I, too, must go. He looked at me with his clear open eye. "One favour at any rate", he said, "I would ask you. Sleep on it." "Of course I will", I answered. I left him trying to deal with Burns—in vain.

III

Monday, August 3.—After breakfast, composed my letter to Asquith, copied it fair at the Privy Council Office, and sent it in to him.

J. M. to Asquith.

August 3, 1914.

My dear Asquith,

I have, as you wished, taken a night to think over my retirement. I have given earnest pains to reach a sensible conclusion.

The thing is clear. Nothing can be so fatal in present circumstances as a Cabinet with divided counsels. Grey has pointed out the essential difference between two views of Neutrality in the present case. Well, I deplore to think that I incline one way, and three or four of my leading colleagues incline the other way. This being so, I could contribute nothing useful to your deliberations, and my presence could only hamper the concentrated energy, the zealous

and convinced accord, that are indispensable. You remember the Peelites entering Palmerston's Cabinet in the Crimean War: they entered it, and resigned in two or three days. If we abandon Neutrality, I fear that within two or three days, vital points might arise that would make my presence a tiresome nuisance.

I press you, therefore, to release me. I propose to come to the Cabinet to-day after the P.C. at the Palace. But I don't expect to be affected by what will pass there. (Cabinet.)

You will believe that I write this with heart-felt pain.

Ever yours,

M.

Privy Council at the Palace and talked with the King. Nothing particular passed, though he seemed to scent what was afoot. Then to Cabinet. Saw Lloyd George, and told him that I had sent in my resignation. He seemed astonished. "*But if you go, it will put us who don't go, in a great hole.*" I made the obvious reply to this truly singular remark. He asked if I had considered the news of Germany bullying Belgium, etc. "Yes", said I, "and it is bad enough, but, in my view, war is not the only reply, and it does not alter my aversion to the

French entente policy and its extended application." He told me that it changed Runciman's line and his own. My impression is that he must have begun the day with one of his customary morning talks with the splendid *condottiere* at the Admiralty, had revised his calculations, as he had a perfect right to do; had made up his mind to swing round, as he had done about the *Panther* in 1911, to the politics of adventure; and found in the German ultimatum to Belgium a sufficiently plausible excuse. I should be ashamed of this want of charity, in the case of any other of my colleagues except Churchill, and possibly the Lord Chancellor. Yet if there is a war, Winston will beat Lloyd George hollow, in spite of ingenious computation.

Then the Prime Minister arrived, with a grave look on his usually undisturbed face. We began with some miscellaneous business of secondary import, I forget what. The Prime Minister then drew himself together in his chair (next to mine), and opened with some severity of tone and aspect[1]—"I have to tell the Cabinet that I have this morning the resignations of four of its members in my hands. Burns you all heard

[1] I afterwards read to Burns this version of what Asquith said, and he pronounced it "admirably right".

last night. To-day I have heard to the same effect from the senior of us all, the one who is the greatest source of the moral authority of the Government. . . . Besides these two, we are to lose Simon and Beauchamp. I understand further that many others in the Cabinet, perhaps a majority, share their views, though not at present following the same course. Then it is represented to me that a majority of our party in the House of Commons lean pretty strongly in the same direction. Well, if the circumstances in which the country is placed were of an ordinary kind, my course would be perfectly clear. I should go at once to the King and beg him to seek other Ministers. But the national situation is far from ordinary, and I cannot persuade myself that the other party is led by men, or contains men, capable of dealing with it. Then the idea of a Coalition naturally occurs to one. But Coalitions have hardly ever turned out well in our history. I could not look hopefully forward to that course. You [or we] might shape a partial Coalition. At any rate it is my duty to place my [or the] position plainly before the Cabinet."

They looked as if they expected me to say something. Naturally and most sincerely I

15498

expressed my regret at adding to the embarrassments of the hour, and repeated the points made in my letter of that morning. What could I look forward to but everlasting wrestles with Winston (at whom I looked with paternal benignity), without being able to contribute a single useful word. If I agreed and held on, I should be like the Peelites, who withdrew from Palmerston's Government two or three days after joining. I feared I must beg the Prime Minister to let me hold to my letter. Simon followed; briefly, but with much emotion, quivering lip and tears in his eyes. He was even firmer than I was. Beauchamp said that he felt bound to associate himself with me. Lloyd George earnestly expostulated, especially to my address. Crewe said a word about his wretched position in the House of Lords, depleted of Beauchamp and me, and he remarked that he could never imagine himself a member of any Government not predominantly and substantially Liberal—in which I thoroughly believe him. Grey, in a lowish tone of suppressed feeling, said how unhappy it made him to be the cause of such dissent and trouble among such friends. By the way, I have forgotten to put down that Asquith, almost at the beginning of his appeal, said with

some emphasis that nothing would induce him to separate from Grey.

We then broke up without further ceremony, in that vague frame in which Cabinets so often disperse, it being understood that we three resigners present had in fact resigned. So ended my last Cabinet, eight and twenty years after my first. Beauchamp took me to his house to luncheon; I have seldom felt such relief, such lightness of heart—the reaction after all those days of tension. My host said he felt just the same. We gossiped about our successors. "Who will take your office?" he asked. "Well," said I with a laugh, "looking round the House of Lords, I can see nobody but my predecessor." "Oh, but how could I take your place, sharing the opinions for which you have left it?"

After luncheon, I went to the Club to rest an hour; then to House of Lords where everybody was talking of Grey's "convincing" exposition of his policy. Nothing passed in the House of Lords, and I soon found myself with the trees and fresh grass and open skies of my home.

Late in the evening Burns arrived. "Have you heard the news? Simon has been got over by the Prime Minister, with some stipulations,

this afternoon, and after him, Beauchamp. So you and I are the only two ! "

. . . .

By partial coalition, I suppose that Asquith was thinking of Pitt in 1804. Temporary co-operation about war, and the conversations and conferences about Home Rule, Amending Bill, etc., might naturally ripen into a formal party engagement. The old Liberalism had done its work, and the time had come for openly changing imperial landmarks, and extinguishing beacons that needed new luminants.

IV

Tuesday, August 4.—Found the usual Cabinet summons on the breakfast table. Of course had no idea of going. While I was munching my dry toast as complacent as man could be, a messenger from Downing Street arrives, bringing a letter marked " Urgent " from the Prime Minister :

Secret

3 *Aug.* 1914,
Midnight.

My dear Morley,

This is, to me, a most afflicting moment.

You know well after nearly 30 years of close and most affectionate association, in the course of which we have not always held the same point of view in regard to accidentals, though in essentials I think we have rarely differed, that to lose you in the stress of a great crisis is a calamity which I shudder to contemplate, and which (if it should become a reality) I shall never cease to deplore.

I therefore beg you, with all my heart, to think twice and thrice, and as many times more as arithmetic can number, before you take a step which impoverishes the Government, and leaves me stranded and almost alone.

Always yours,

H. H. ASQUITH (signed).

No more complacency ! Really nothing short of mental anguish held me by the throat. I paced my library quarter of an hour, and my garden for quarter of an hour more. Then I got into the motor to drive for a Privy Council at Palace. By the time I reached my Office at Whitehall, my concentrated thought in the motor had cleared all doubts away. My nerve had become good as usual, my temper as cool. I sat down and concocted my letter to the Prime Minister, copied the draft and sent it in to its destination.

Aug. 4, 1914.

MY DEAR ASQUITH,

Your letter shakes me terribly. It goes to my very core. In spite of temporary moments of difference, my feelings for you have been cordial, deep, close, from your earliest days, and the idea of severing our affectionate associa-

tion has been the most poignant element in the stress of the last four days.

But I cannot conceal from myself that we —I and the leading men of the Cabinet—do not mean the same thing in the foreign policy of the moment. To swear ourselves to France is to bind ourselves to Russia, and to whatever demands may be made by Russia on France. With this cardinal difference, how could I either decently or usefully sit in a cabinet day after day discussing military and diplomatic details in a policy which I think a mistake. Again I say divided counsels are fatal.

I am more distressed in making this reply to your generous and moving appeal than I have ever been in writing any letter of all my life.

Ever yours,

M.

At the Palace, the King, who had been aware since Monday of the prospect of my resignation, asked me for the second or third time whether I was in or out. I said out, until he had named my successor. He said in a rather sincere tone that he was very sorry. I take this to be the date of my resignation, though emoluments were paid up to August 5.

I looked to the past in this short episode without self-reproach. I parted from friends without a wound or even a scratch, I could not comprehend them all, and two of them I had no choice but to *judge*. I looked to my brief future with steady self-control, meaning to imitate Michelangelo's figure of the Pensieroso in my library,[1] — with a firm mind pondering stern things.

Grato m' è 'l sonno, e più l' esser di sasso.

[1] Morley wrote in his *Recollections* (1917), Book I., chap. iv.: "I had a cast of Michelangelo's famous figure of the Penseroso in a library, presiding over an array of shelves well stocked with saints, sages, and some demoniacs, with

A look that's fastened to the ground,
A tongue chained up without a sound."

APPENDIX

Extracted from "Great Britain and the European Crisis", published by H.M. Government in September 1914.

No. 6

Sir G. Buchanan, British Ambassador at St. Petersburgh, to Sir Edward Grey

(*Received July* 24)

St. Petersburgh,
July 24, 1914.

(Telegraphic)

I had a telephone message this morning from M. Sazonof [1] to the effect that the text of the Austrian ultimatum had just reached him.

His Excellency added that a reply within forty-eight hours was demanded, and he begged me to meet him at the French Embassy to discuss matters, as Austrian step clearly meant that war was imminent.

Minister for Foreign Affairs said that Austria's conduct was both provocative and immoral; she would never have taken such action unless Germany had first been consulted; some of her demands were quite impossible of acceptance. He hoped that His Majesty's Govern-

[1] Russian Minister for Foreign Affairs.

ment would not fail to proclaim their solidarity with Russia and France.

The French Ambassador gave me to understand that France would fulfil all the obligations entailed by her alliance with Russia, if necessity arose, besides supporting Russia strongly in my diplomatic negotiations.

I said that I would telegraph a full report to you of what their Excellencies had just said to me. I could not, of course, speak in the name of His Majesty's Government but personally I saw no reason to expect any declaration of solidarity from His Majesty's Government that would entail an unconditional engagement on their part to support Russia and France by force of arms. Direct British interests in Servia were nil, and a war on behalf of that country would never be sanctioned by British public opinion. To this M. Sazonof replied that we must not forget that the general European question was involved, the Servian question being but a part of the former, and that Great Britain could not afford to efface herself from the problems now at issue.

In reply to these remarks, I observed that I gathered from what he said that his Excellency was suggesting that Great Britain should join in making a communication to Austria to the effect that active intervention by her in the internal affairs of Servia could not be tolerated. But supposing Austria nevertheless proceeded to embark on military measures against Servia in spite of our representations, was it the intention of the Russian Government forthwith to declare war on Austria ?

M. Sazonof said that he himself thought that Russian

mobilisation would at any rate have to be carried out; but a council of Ministers was being held this afternoon to consider the whole question. A further council would be held, probably to-morrow, at which the Emperor would preside, when a decision would be come to.

I said that it seemed to me that the important point was to induce Austria to extend the time limit, and that the first thing to do was to bring an influence to bear on Austria with that end in view; French Ambassador, however, thought that either Austria had made up her mind to act at once or that she was bluffing. Whichever it might be, our only chance of averting war was for us to adopt a firm and united attitude. He did not think there was time to carry out my suggestion. Thereupon I said that it seemed to me desirable that we should know just how far Servia was prepared to go to meet the demands formulated by Austria in her note. M. Sazonof replied that he must first consult his colleagues on this point, but that doubtless some of the Austrian demands could be accepted by Servia.

French Ambassador and M. Sazonof both continued to press me for a declaration of complete solidarity of His Majesty's Government with French and Russian Governments, and I therefore said that it seemed to me possible that you might perhaps be willing to make strong representations to both German and Austrian Governments, urging upon them that an attack by Austria upon Servia would endanger the whole peace of Europe. Perhaps you might see your way to saying to them that such action on the part of Austria would probably mean

Russian intervention, which would involve France and Germany, and that it would be difficult for Great Britain to keep out if the war were to become general. M. Sazonof answered that we would sooner or later be dragged into war if it did break out; we should have rendered war more likely if we did not from the outset make common cause with his country and with France; at any rate, he hoped His Majesty's Government would express strong reprobation of action taken by Austria.

President of French Republic and President of the Council cannot reach France, on their return from Russia, for four or five days, and it looks as though Austria purposely chose this moment to present their ultimatum.

It seems to me, from the language held by French Ambassador, that, even if we decline to join them, France and Russia are determined to make a strong stand.

No. 114

SIR EDWARD GREY TO SIR F. BERTIE, BRITISH AMBASSADOR AT PARIS, AND SIR E. GOSCHEN, BRITISH AMBASSADOR AT BERLIN

FOREIGN OFFICE,
July 31, 1914.

(Telegraphic)

I STILL trust that the situation is not irretrievable, but in view of prospect of mobilisation in Germany it becomes essential to His Majesty's Government, in view of existing treaties, to ask whether French (German)

Government are prepared to engage to respect neutrality of Belgium so long as no other Power violates it.

A similar request is being addressed to German (French) Government. It is important to have an early answer.

No. 122

Sir E. Goschen, British Ambassador at Berlin, to Sir Edward Grey

(Received August 1)

Berlin, *July* 31, 1914.

(Telegraphic)

Neutrality of Belgium, referred to in your telegram of 31st July to Sir F. Bertie.[1]

I have seen Secretary of State, who informs me that he must consult the Emperor and the Chancellor before he could possibly answer. I gathered from what he said that he thought any reply they might give could not but disclose a certain amount of their plan of campaign in the event of war ensuing, and he was therefore very doubtful whether they would return any answer at all. His Excellency, nevertheless, took note of your request.

It appears from what he said that German Government consider that certain hostile acts have already been committed by Belgium. As an instance of this, he alleged that a consignment of corn for Germany had been placed under an embargo already.

I hope to see his Excellency to-morrow again to

[1] See No. 114.

discuss the matter further, but the prospect of obtaining a definite answer seems to me remote.

In speaking to me to-day the Chancellor made it clear that Germany would in any case desire to know the reply returned to you by the French Government.

No. 123

Sir Edward Grey to Sir E. Goschen, British Ambassador at Berlin

Foreign Office,
August 1, 1914.

Sir—I told the German Ambassador to-day that the reply [1] of the German Government with regard to the neutrality of Belgium was a matter of very great regret, because the neutrality of Belgium affected feeling in this country. If Germany could see her way to give the same assurance as that which had been given by France, it would materially contribute to relieve anxiety and tension here. On the other hand, if there were a violation of the neutrality of Belgium by one combatant, while the other respected it, it would be extremely difficult to restrain public feeling in this country. I said that we had been discussing this question at a Cabinet meeting, and as I was authorised to tell him this I gave him a memorandum of it.

He asked me whether, if Germany gave a promise not to violate Belgian neutrality we would engage to remain neutral.

[1] See No. 122.

I replied that I could not say that; our hands were still free, and we were considering what our attitude should be. All I could say was that our attitude would be determined largely by public opinion here, and that the neutrality of Belgium would appeal very strongly to public opinion here. I did not think that we could give a promise of neutrality on that condition alone.

The Ambassador pressed me as to whether I could not formulate conditions on which we would remain neutral. He even suggested that the integrity of France and her colonies might be guaranteed.

I said that I felt obliged to refuse definitely any promise to remain neutral on similar terms, and I could only say that we must keep our hands free.

I am, etc.,

E. GREY.

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